



T/TAC Link Lines

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Instructional Support Team Effort

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Instructional Support Team (IST) training is an initiative of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) designed to develop school-based teams of professionals who support classroom teachers efforts to assist struggling learners. The mission of instructional support is to provide students who are at risk of school failure with the necessary academic, behavioral, communication, and/or social supports to succeed in school. This effort is accomplished through collaborative school-based teams in which the shared expertise of team members is focused on empowering teachers to meet the individual needs of students. A well-trained and committed IST precludes the need for special education classification for some students and facilitates the inclusion of students who require special education services in general education classrooms. The intended outcome of IST is a more instructionally responsive school for students and teachers alike.

The philosophy of IST is based upon the following seven principles:

- All students learn.
- The critical arena for success is the student-teacher relationship within the general education classroom.
- A problem-solving community is the foundation for professional and student learning.
- The instructional match and setting is the focus of problem solving.
- Early intervention is preferable to waiting for failure.
- Teachers, as professionals, are entitled to the opportunity to consult and collaborate.
- Change is a process, not an event.

Effective ISTs consist of an administrator, general educators, a special educator, the school psychologist, a guidance counselor, and additional support personnel such as a reading specialist or the school nurse. A full-time

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Instructional Support Teacher leads the team. These professionals receive extensive training through the VDOE in the following areas:

- IST philosophy, mission, beliefs, and goals
- Process of complex change
- Case management model – roles and responsibilities of IST members, components of the IST model, and instructional consultation process and skills
- Interpersonal skills – communication, problem solving, facilitation, and team process
- Content skills – curriculum-based assessment, systematic observation, task analysis, and data collection, record keeping, analysis, and reporting

Once IST members have been trained, they begin to accept requests for assistance. When a teacher requests assistance, the following sequence of events occurs:

1. The IST teacher assigns case management of the request to an IST member.
2. The IST case manager meets with the requesting teacher to explain the consultation process and ascertain the teacher's commitment to the process.
3. The case manager collaborates with the teacher to frame the student's academic problems in observable terms, prioritize these problems, collect baseline data, and establish a time frame for closing the instructional gap.
4. The case manager meets with the teacher to share and/or design appropriate instructional interventions. The object of these interventions is to match the student's instructional level to effective teaching and learning strategies that will correct identified skill deficiencies. Often the case manager shares strategies learned during IST training and models them at the teacher's request.
5. The teacher implements the proposed interventions with the student.
6. The case manager and teacher evaluate the success of the intervention/s. If interventions have been unsuccessful, they return to Step 3. The case manager may also request additional assistance from other IST case managers.
7. If the problem is resolved, the case is closed.

The VDOE is in the process of establishing model IST sites throughout the Commonwealth. During the 2001-02 school year selected schools in Goochland, Dinwiddie, and Surry counties will begin the third year of their three-year training initiative. Schools participating in Year Two training include the elementary schools of West Point, Matthews, and King William counties. The VDOE plans to establish additional IST sites in Northern Virginia and Tidewater during fall 2001. All schools involved in this initiative receive intensive training from consultants Todd Gravois, Ph.D., and Edward Gickling, Ph.D. Monthly follow-up assistance and support are provided on site by T/TAC specialists at The College of William and Mary, Virginia Commonwealth University, and George Mason University.

VDOE also provides funds to purchase training materials and to defray a portion of the IST teacher's salary for three years. For more information about the IST initiative in this area, contact the T/TAC William and Mary specialists listed below.

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